

URBAN DESIGN

To build upon the revitalization strategies reviewed in the Historic Preservation, Market Economics, Land Use and Transportation sections, the planning team has also developed the following urban design recommendations. The urban design concept and strategies proposed for the Takoma Central District are intended to help ensure that the policy, program and operational solutions proposed in the previous sections are implemented in a manner that embraces and complements the community's goals for the physical character of the district.

Urban Design Concept

The overall concept for a small scale, mixed-use, pedestrian oriented, neighborhood business district and many of the specific design features of previous Takoma planning efforts still remain valid today. Creating a community open space on Carroll Street, linking existing commercial areas, siting buildings close to streets, maintaining sight lines, minimizing large parking lots and improving the Metro underpass will all contribute to creating an active, pleasant, "people" place for Takoma. However, in order to achieve this desired community character, the underlying urban design framework must be reinforced and improved:

- As discussed previously, a signature open space should be developed as a town center and gateway for the community. This Village Green environment should be of high quality design and provide an extension of pedestrian activities along Carroll Street, and connection to, from and through the Metro station site. As part of any proposed development at the Metro site, the station itself should be enhanced with improved community amenities to better service its many transit users.
- The overall quality of streets and streetscape treatments in the Central District must be enhanced in order to provide pedestrian safety, comfort and interest and make the area more attractive and inviting to residents, visitors and private investors. Continuous, safe and adequate sidewalks and crossings to and from important area destinations are also critical to achieving an active, pedestrian-friendly public realm. Areas in particular need of improvements include the Metro station and underpass, Carroll Street, 4th Street, Blair Road and Chestnut Street.
- Infill development of compatible scale and use to the neighborhood should replace vacant lots and underutilized properties and help form continuous, active building edges that invite pedestrian movement.

- The residential communities east and west of the Metro tracks need to be better linked. This can be achieved through improved development patterns and one or more additional entrances on the western side of the Metro station.



Existing Metro station open space



Neighborhood gathering at William J. Bowman Square, Vermilion, NC

Urban Design Revitalization Strategies

Revitalization of Takoma's Central District requires renewing the area as a vibrant, well designed and attractive mixed use community. The strategies recommended below review how this vision can be achieved through better urban design, including a detailed summary of site guidelines for potential new development at the Metro station site.

1. **Create a Village Green as the Central District's Signature Open Space.** Many residents of the Takoma community have strong feelings about the existing Metro station open space area. Although this plan calls for new development at the Metro site, it also recommends creation of a major new open space area on Carroll Street adjacent to the Metro station entrance to help define this site as a focal point for the Central District and better serve residents as a community space and gathering place. This Village Green should include a variety of uses, including passive and active areas and features for more formal community gatherings. The green should be an extension of the public realm and activities along Carroll Street and help form a continuous connection to, from and through the Metro station area (see [Figure N](#)).

Figure N

Illustrative Sketch of Village Green





Existing Metro entrance



Metro wall along Blair Road



Existing pedestrian crossings at 4th St intersection

2. **Provide western entrances to Metro station in order to reknit communities east and west off the tracks.** While the Metro station successfully links the Takoma community to the greater Washington Metro area, its large, unbroken, retaining walls and elevated rails constitute both a physical and psychological barrier between areas east and west of the Metro tracks. In a district with an otherwise finely grained urban pattern, the elevated Metro features many of the negative attributes of a large impenetrable “super-block”. Additionally, the single, east side entry to the Metro station on Carroll Street creates the impression that Metro mainly serves areas east of the tracks. To counteract the perception of Metro as a barrier to pedestrian access and to help reinforce the continuity of the urban fabric on both sides of the tracks, at least one additional western entrance to the Metro station is should be provided. Opening up the station to the Cedar Road/Blair St/ 4th St area with easy pedestrian access will also help activate deserted areas along the Metro and boost the retail potential of 4th Street.
3. **Enhance the Metro station as a community gateway.** Even though Metro typically uses an understated form of architecture to define its stations, a more activated and prominent station design is recommended for Takoma. The station site is a principle gateway into the neighborhood for Metro riders. In addition to encouraging pedestrian access to and from the Metro, the site should enhance the experience of arriving in the neighborhood. The Metro station, station amenities, routes to the station, and especially the underpass along Carroll Street should be improved for comfort, pedestrian safety and community use. Kiosks should be added near the station entrance, the Metro underpass should be enhanced with streetscape treatment and public art and the number of bicycle racks should be increased to accommodate additional bike riders, especially those anticipated from the proposed Metropolitan Branch Trail.
4. **Improve overall streetscape quality.** Streetscape design guidelines and a streetscape enhancement program should be developed for the primary streets in the Central District. Areas that need immediate improvement and upgrade include: Carroll Street, 4th Street, Blair Road, Chestnut Street, Aspen Street (especially the Metro underpass area), Sandy Spring Road/Maple Street and Willow Street. The streetscape program should be designed and coordinated with the City of Takoma Park and Montgomery County, Maryland to create seamless and transparent connections across the DC/MD boundary. Streetscape design standards and treatments should include street sections, key intersection treatments, street tree plans, paving materials, light fixtures, signage, benches, bicycle racks, and other features.

5. Increase pedestrian safety. Streets should provide comfort and safety for pedestrians. Continuous, safe and adequate sidewalks and crossings connecting important area destinations are critical to achieve an active pedestrian-oriented public realm. Streets that need immediate improvements and upgrades include Blair Road, Carroll Street, 4th Street, the Metro underpass, and others as outlined in the Transportation section.

6. Improve built edges, public frontages and retail storefronts along major commercial corridors and pedestrian connectors.

- *Create consistent street walls and setbacks along primary corridors:* Current regulation of building location, definition and setback does not achieve the goal of an active, engaging pedestrian-oriented public realm. This deficiency is exemplified by the relatively recent CVS building on Carroll Street. In order to achieve compatible revitalization in the district, buildings along Carroll Street, 4th Street and sections of Blair Road are encouraged to be built to the property line at densities supported by current zoning up to four stories in height.
- *Create continuous, active street frontage and retail storefronts along major commercial corridors:* While all streets in the district should comfortably accommodate pedestrians, certain streets should have a distinctly active, pedestrian-oriented character. Carroll Street should be the primary retail, shopping and east-west connector street, with continuous, high quality retail frontage on the ground floor, transparent storefronts, tasteful signage and limited curb cuts (see [Figure O](#)). Blank walls, service areas and parking should not be permitted to front on the street. Active ground floor uses should be required along Carroll and 4th Streets and at the Cedar Street/Blair Road corner, with facade improvements along 4th Street.



Example of consistent street wall and retail frontage along Laurel Street in Takoma Park, MD



4th Street retail frontage in Takoma, DC



Building frontages along Carroll Street in Takoma, DC

Figure O

Illustrative Sketch of Retail Frontage, South Side of Carroll Street



- 7. Establish specific redevelopment guidelines for the Metro station site.** The Takoma Metro station represents a significant public investment in mass transit. It is imperative that the Metro site continues to serve transit needs first, and the revitalization goals of the community second. It is equally important to acknowledge community concerns regarding preservation of open space on the site and protection of nearby residents most directly impacted by Metro functions. However, Metro is actively considering a development proposal for the Takoma station site as part of the agency's Joint Development Program, and will consider others if the current project does not move forward. Private development of a portion of the station site is therefore highly likely in the next several years.

As Metro's consideration of development proposals progresses, it is critical that the agency reviews such projects in terms of the overall objectives and planning goals that the community has put forward through the Takoma Central District planning process. Site-specific guidelines are therefore proposed for the Metro station site to help ensure compatible development density, coherent architectural character, buffering of impacted residences, adequate transit facilities and overall design of the highest quality. Specific site objectives, basic planning goals and specific redevelopment guidelines for the Metro station site are recommended as follows:

- *Site Objectives*

- Meet current and future transit operational requirements.
- Provide open space for the community.
- Accommodate development that furthers revitalization goals, achieves compatible architecture and scale and implements "smart growth" policies.

- *Basic Planning Goals*

Operational Requirements:

- The Takoma station has the highest percentage pedestrian use in the Metro system - 43% of riders arrive and leave by foot. Easy, safe and direct station access for pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles and buses should be accommodated first.
- Planning and design should accommodate the current and projected needs of both Metro and Ride-On buses.
- Transit operations and related functions (including bus idling) should be accommodated on the Metro site to minimize adverse impacts on nearby residential neighborhoods.

Open Space and Buffers:

- A range of 0.8 to 1.2 acres of open space should be provided and enhanced as the community's Village Green.

- An appropriate buffer should be provided adjacent to areas on Eastern Avenue directly impacted by station operations.

Development Capacity:

- Development at the Metro station site should provide an appropriate transition to the existing garden apartments and single-family homes on Eastern Avenue.
- The suggested development threshold for the Metro station site is approximately 65-95 townhomes at 22-32 units/acre.

■ *Redevelopment Guidelines*

Village Green:

- Provide a community open space of 0.8 to 1.2 acres.
- Locate and design to provide visual continuity.
- Design as a public green with a park-like environment (as opposed to an urban plaza).
- Strengthen the pedestrian character of the urban edge of Carroll Street and extend pedestrian access eastward towards Old Town Takoma Park and into adjacent residential neighborhoods.
- Be part of the public realm and not restricted as part of private development.
- Provide an appropriate degree of comfort and amenity, including special pavement materials, image features/focal points, landscaping, lighting and seating.
- Consider the incorporation of historic components, including maps, date markers, interpretive signs and other components in appropriate design elements, such as sitting areas.

Community Connections:

- New development should be responsive to and relate to the surrounding community.
- New development should address and front upon existing neighborhoods and streets to increase pedestrian safety and activity.
- A minimum front yard setback of ten feet is strongly encouraged along Eastern Avenue and Cedar Street to provide a transitional community frontage with existing residential uses on the east side of these streets.
- A landscaped buffer of no less than fifty feet should be provided between the Metro station's transit functions and existing residential uses, such as the multi-family structures to the north along Eastern Avenue.
- New development should include direct public pedestrian access to the Metro station and incorporate thru-streets that connect to the existing street system.
- The new Metro parking facility should be located so that it is convenient for both commercial district and Metro users and



Community park & gathering place defined by townhouse development, William J. Bowman Square, Vermilion, NC



Proposed Community Green - San Jose, CA



Building fronts that relate to and address streets and pedestrian routes - Alexandria, VA



Townhouse facades that relate in scale and massing to adjacent single-family homes - Alexandria, VA

minimizes impacts to adjacent residential properties, particularly those along Eastern Avenue.

- Access to the new Metro parking facility should be designed as an integral part of the site's road system, possibly with additional on-street metered parking.
- New development adjacent to the Metro station should seek to promote transit use by minimizing development of parking spaces (encourage a 1 to 1 unit/parking space ratio and on-street parking).
- New development should allow for views and access to and from the Metro station.
- New development should be sited to reinforce the clarity of public spaces, including clear boundaries with public areas such as the Village Green.
- Live/work units fronting upon the Village Green should offer active ground floor retail and personal service uses that will advance the district's revitalization goals. Service areas should be located or screened to minimize adverse impacts on surrounding residential neighborhoods and public spaces.

Scale & Massing:

- New development should provide an appropriate design transition to the garden apartments and single-family homes on Eastern Avenue.
- Focus taller structures (up to four stories) along edges that front upon the Village Green and Metro transit functions.
- For townhouse development, a break in the street wall and facades should occur after every 6-8 units to provide visual relief and discourage large, solid unbroken walls. Breaks should occur even more frequently along edges facing existing single family homes.

Quality:

- New development should be of high quality, high-energy efficiency materials and design; "green" and non-toxic materials (for good indoor air quality) should be used where feasible.
- Porches, bays and dormers as well as other design elements are encouraged to relate to existing architectural styles in the community.

A Conceptual Redevelopment Plan incorporating the recommendations described above is shown in Figure P below. This plan is presented as a visual guide for redevelopment of the Metro station site. Any final redevelopment proposal for the site will be required to undergo all applicable development review processes required by Metro and DC Government, including design review by the DC Historic Preservation Review Board. It is also recommended that the site development

plan for such a project be reviewed as a Planned Unit Development (PUD) to ensure appropriate public involvement and review.

For an overview of the specific components of the Conceptual Redevelopment Plan, please see the description of the Illustrative Redevelopment Scenario for the entire Central District that is presented in the following section.

Figure P
Conceptual Redevelopment Plan for Takoma Metro Station Site

